

Paducah Sun, The (KY) - Tuesday, April 14, 2009

MSU students face tuition hike

Apr. 14--MURRAY, Ky. -- The Murray State University Board of Regents raised tuition 4 percent Monday, but then added more costs for some students based on how many hours of classes they take per semester.

The 4 percent rate hike means full-time students will pay between \$114 and \$369 more per semester, depending on whether they are undergraduate or graduate students and whether or not they pay in-state tuition.

Additionally, undergraduate students taking more than 12 credit hours of classes per semester and graduate students taking more than nine hours per semester will pay a fee for every extra hour taken each semester. The fee is based on a formula in which students divide their tuition and fees cost by either 12 (undergraduate) or nine (graduate) and pay one-quarter of that amount per additional credit hour. Using that formula, students will pay between \$62.25 and \$265.12 per extra credit hour.

The regents voted 10-1 on the tuition plan, with only Marilyn Buchanon voting against it.

Most degree programs require at least 120 hours, with some teaching certificate programs requiring as many as 138 hours, said Gary Brockway, provost and vice president for academic affairs. That means many students would take 15 to 18 hours each semester to graduate in four years.

Because of the expected course load, the university's tuition taskforce had recommended additional per-hour fees only for undergraduate students taking more than 15 hours each semester or graduate students taking more than 12 hours a semester. But the rate would have been higher: \$249 per extra hour a semester for in-state undergraduate students, more for others. Regents debated for more than three hours before rejecting the recommendation. They took only minutes to increase the cost of student housing by 9.5 percent and meal plans by 9 percent.

Nine people addressed the regents during the meeting, and all opposed the taskforce's recommendation. They said it would unfairly penalize many students taking one-hour or two-hour classes, including music ensembles and freshman orientation.

"To me, by doing this we're penalizing our best and brightest and most aggressive students," Buchanon said of the taskforce's recommendation. She recommended reducing expenditures rather than increasing revenue to balance the budget.

Taskforce chairman Jeff Taylor, another regent, disagreed.

"There are only so many light bulbs we can turn off," he said.

Board of Regents chairman Alan Stout advised against cutting programs and services.

"It comes up time and time again that students tell me they don't want to affect the quality of the programs," he said.

Student regent Kara Mantooth said most students attending two tuition forums last week also disagreed with the taskforce's recommendation. Regarding proposals like the one eventually adopted, she said, "That's what they seem most comfortable with."

Raising tuition was necessary because of the state's reducing appropriations by nearly \$1.1 million for the 2009-10 school year and because fixed costs and raises will cost another \$1.5 million, said Randy Dunn, Murray State president. Because the Council on Postsecondary Education capped the increase at 4 percent, the university had to find another way to balance its budget, he said.

He projected the new tuition plan will bring in roughly \$3.4 million more than the current year's total, leaving the university \$800,000 in discretionary spending.

"I think everyone saw that there was no good answer, but this might be a good middle ground," Dunn said.

He anticipated no problems with the Council on Postsecondary Education's approving the plan because some other Kentucky universities use similar tuition structures, he said.

A standing room-only crowd of more than 60 people attended the meeting.

TUITION/FEES PER SEMESTER

2008-09 Undergraduate

--Full-time, in-state: \$2,874

--Full-time, out-of-state: \$7,806

Graduate

--Full-time, in-state: \$3,262.50

--Full-time, out-of-state: \$9,175.50

2009-10 Undergraduate

--Full-time, in-state: \$2,988, plus \$62.25 per credit hour over 12.

--Full-time, out-of-state: \$8,118, plus \$169.12 per credit hour over 12.

Graduate

--Full-time, in-state: \$3,393, plus \$94.25 per credit hour over 9.

--Full-time, out-of-state: \$9,544.50, plus \$265.12 per credit hour over 9.

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